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**James V. Brownson, *The Promise of Baptism. An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 237. £8.99, \ \$16.00.**

David F. Wright

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James V. Brownson, *The Promise of Baptism. An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 237. £8.99, \$16.00.

The author of this addition to the steadily growing harvest of books on baptism is a church professor of theology teaching New Testament for the Reformed Church in America (RCA) at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI. It is intended for all those interested in baptism, from teenagers to seminary students and church elders. Its thirty brief chapters each address a question or two and end with a summary and pointers to further reflection and study. Much of its value lies in its accessibility to non-specialist readers and its rootedness in the practical concerns of different categories of church people. It deals with these in the context and with the resources of the Reformed tradition and hence with due regard for the centrality of scripture. At the same time it reflects only limited awareness of the recent revisiting of the divisive waters of baptism in other major Christian traditions and in ecumenical debate. As such the book represents a cautious, contemporary restatement of what I take to be the RCA's position on baptism without significant engagement with the main lines of emerging consensus across the churches.

Thus the defence of infant baptism given here is decided but relatively modest, with no trace of that paedobaptist monism which has disfigured some modern Reformed defences, not least in the reviewer's home patch. It is refreshing to find basic issues of being a Christian, church membership, sacraments, faith and salvation and even the core meanings of baptism – addressed first in terms of Romans 6:3–11 – before we come to the case for infant baptism. Yet, for parents not persuaded about infant baptism, the only alternative discussed is Baptist-style dedication, whereas numerous paedobaptist denominations now offer services not of dedication but of thanksgiving or blessing for a child's birth or adoption, in accordance with Jesus' blessing of young children. There are other elements reflecting a paedobaptist versus believer baptist polarisation, such as a reference to 'believer baptist exegesis' of Colossians 2:11–12 and the characterisation of two volumes of essays to which this paedobaptist reviewer contributed as written from 'a believer baptist perspective'. Much of the baptismal debate has moved on beyond these inherited dichotomies, such as the choice between whether baptism is what God does or what human beings do. (I commend the current Church of Scotland approach, which holds together the gift of grace and the response of faith.)

Professor Brownson has given us a book, then, strong in its pastoral orientation and in its anchorage in a fairly traditional deployment of the biblical resources, such as the covenant framework. It successfully avoids the Reformed tendency to present infant baptism as more or less the Christian form of circumcision and refuses to view baptism as merely signifiatory, declarative and promissory, although there is an awkward tension between receiving the Spirit in baptism and not being regenerated in baptism. What one misses is most of that renewal of baptismal understanding and practice in which post-Vatican II Catholicism has led the way but other traditions have shared, marked in particular by the New Testament-led recognition that the norm of baptism is faith-baptism and that infant baptism has to be approached from this perspective.

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Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. xiii + 304. £9.99; \$20.00.

Tom Smail has written a theologically nuanced account of humanity viewed from the perspective of the triune God in whose image we are made. What Smail manages to do quite admirably is to argue that God's self-revelation in Christ as perfected by the Spirit is that which gives us our cues as to the shape of genuine human existence – 'what you say about the image depends on what you know about the original' (p. 2). What results is a *dogmatic* description of how the activity of Father, Son and Spirit in the revelatory economy funds a true picture of the shape of human existence as 'free to be initiating' in accordance with the image of the Father, 'responsive to the claims of others' in accordance with the image of the Son and liberated for 'dynamic creativity' in accordance with the image of the Spirit (p. 200).

Eschewing projectionist understandings of God, Smail paints a portrait of God 'as a community of autonomous but totally interdependent persons in relationship' (p. 78). God is thus a tripersonal reality, one in whose life exists 'the presence of an authentic personal other' (p. 85). For Smail, only such a doctrine of God has the theological resources necessary to combat an individualistic anthropology and ecclesiology. In the process of articulating such a doctrine of God, Smail, following Colin Gunton's reading of Augustine and Barth, offers an account of what he thinks is wrong with the Western tradition's doctrine of God, namely, the eclipsing of the person and work of the Spirit. While one could certainly take issue with